

Going Over There on an American Transport

Last Voyage of the President Lincoln, Recently Sunk, Described—Converted German Vessels Models of Utility and Safety and Men Are Gay Though Well Disciplined

THERE are three sources of authority to which the person curious to see a transport that has been used or fitted out for use in carrying American soldiers "over there" may apply for permission to go aboard. One of these is the Army Transport Service, by which a pass is refused without explanation. Another is the commandant in charge of naval construction, who will take under consideration a request for a pass and politely forget it. This official may be sought in Hoboken.

There remains a last hope, the Navy Department at Washington, which may under proper conditions grant the desired permission. As chance would have it, the transport visited was the former Hamburg-American liner President Lincoln, which was sunk ten days ago by a submarine 800 miles at sea while on her way back to the United States. The visit was made just before she started on her trip from this side.

The visitor's impressions of the President Lincoln as a transport are printed as they were written.

The ship has been indefatigable in the transport service. Beginning as soon as it was taken over, it has made constant trips to the other side, carrying troops and provisions, and while it is not a particularly fast vessel these trips have been accomplished on almost schedule time. Such changes have been made in it as were necessary to accommodate 6,000 men in addition to the crew and provisions for a month for this number of troops.

The decks of the steamship present a totally different appearance from her passenger days. They are bare of deck chairs or any other thing that would encumber them and interfere with their use as an exercise and drill ground. All non-essentials have been swept away, but the ship is none the less attractive for their absence.

Large Space for Recreation.

Cabins and smoking rooms on the hurricane deck have been opened into one another and furnish no small recreation space, which is set with small tables for cards and other light games. The decks below and the former saloons and drawing rooms exhibit the greatest change. Their furnishings have been taken out and now serve mostly in club rooms for soldiers and marines when they are ashore. Available space for hammocks and army cots is yielded to nothing besides on these sleeping decks.

Almost as regularly as she used to do in the passenger traffic the President Lincoln departs from an Atlantic port bearing her complement of precious lives and hardly less precious food. The big difference is the way she takes her passengers aboard.

As may very well be presumed, the embarkation is not made with a boom and a bang. No noisy band plays the soldiers out of the harbor and when they come over the side there are no lines of grinning stewards and gaping seamen at the rails. Everything is done in an orderly and quiet way.

Between darkness and dawn the embarkation takes place and about the same hour, but with a day between, the transport starts quietly from her port to meet

her conveying destroyers somewhere in the broad Atlantic. Mysteriously as the trains roll into the terminals loaded with soldiers, somehow the news does get to the "all nighters" and they are happy to run along the platforms by the slowly moving cars and throw into the open windows little gifts of candy, smokes and other trifles that the boys are delighted to get.

As the men come on board and are assigned in platoons to quarters they are given the following articles: a length of strong white canvas six feet by four, the hammock, a mattress which will serve at need as a life preserver, a thick blanket and a big bath towel. These things with their toilet articles form the necessities of the voyage.

Having received them the soldiers are filed down in platoons to their quarters on the ship and a half dozen marines instruct them in how to swing and lash the hammock, a task in which, by the way, they have already received some theoretic drill at the cantonments.

Dining Tables Immaculate.

On the lower deck between the ports are set tables of bright white pine scrubbed to a nicety. At intervals are sculleries which are to serve for butler's pantries. At these tables the men of each platoon has his assigned place for chow and at other times the tables are used for reading, study, writing or recreation like cards. A shelf is handily placed near the tables to hold books, writing materials, &c.

Let us imagine that a transport has dropped down the river from a port near Baltimore and is fairly started on her voyage down the Chesapeake to meet the convoys outside. At the first peep of day a gong resounds through each deck and the deck master's voice is heard shouting: "Hit the deck, mates!"

The electric lights are switched on as a second invitation to the sleepy heads, and before five minutes have elapsed every man is out of his hammock, folding his blanket and cowering up his hammock. A simultaneous grab is made for the toilet articles and the men line up for roll call. Each platoon, remember, is treated as an entity and this preliminary passes quicker than might seem possible.

Then follows the rush of the boys to the shower baths, and it is a rush. Jostling and cheering, they are shoved up one by one and shouts of healthy enjoyment greet the rush of water, while all sorts of horse play, including a good deal of spattering ensue. Back to their hammocks they rush, shaking their bath towels, and another few minutes are given to cleaning up and getting into their clothes.

Inspection comes next and it is a function of every morning. Absolute cleanliness is required and insisted on. The inspection is made by officers, changed every day, who appear at this early hour in complete uniform even to the spotless white gloves.

All are now ready for chow and from the companion way arrive two jackies staggering under an immense cylinder. Behind them walks another carrying a great can like a gigantic milk can and then come two others, each loaded with four loaves of bread, the size that a Gargantua would need for a little snack. By

this time the men are seated at their tables and they give way unrebuked to all kinds of merriment.

In the cylinder when the top is unscrewed in the scullery are nests of vessels holding the soup and meat and vegetables and keeping them as hot as when they left the cook's galley. The big can is in fact a thermos bottle which gives up steaming coffee. Tea and cocoa are served also, but by tradition all these liquids pass under one name which the landsmen soon adopt. It is "Java."

The food is plentiful and good. At two meals there are always beans cooked to a consistency of soup, and meat is served once a day, commonly a stew. A fresh vegetable appears on every menu for dinner and supper. At the last meal of the day apples or jam serve as a dainty and occasionally stewed fruit.

The breakfast hour is 6 o'clock, dinner follows at 11:30 and supper at 4:30. Sometimes a lunch of crackers and bouillon is served on deck between dinner and supper. The men are in their bunks and hammocks by sundown and the black transport, all lights out, moves steadily through the night.

As the majority of the soldiers have never been at sea extra attention is paid to the poor sailors in the early days of the voyage, and the diet of these differs somewhat from that of the hardy men who do not sacrifice to Neptune. All the men are in good health when they come aboard; that is a point carefully looked after, but some of the Westerners may be counted on to fill the bunks in the hospital, of which there are several.

The seasick do not stay there very long, because the remedies provided for hardening up the stomach are not particularly palatable and these have to be taken under the eye of a ship's doctor. No matter how nasty it may be pill or potion has to be swallowed.

Exercise the Best Preventive.

Exercise is with the soldiers, as with all landsmen, the best preventive of seasickness, and when the sufferer once gets this fact in his head he doesn't willingly bother the hospital. Shortly after breakfast the soldiers are taken to the main deck in relays and put through a severe drill.

When all have had this prescribed exercise they may hike the deck until luncheon time. Lounge and play time comes in the afternoon, when any one who wants to smoke on deck may do so. No smoking is permitted between decks or on the main deck. In the reconstructed liners the usual smoking room is given up to the exclusive use of officers.

All the well known games which have been used since the first transatlantic voyage appear in the recreation hour and many of the soldiers have proved themselves adroit at shuffleboard and quoits. Card playing is not encouraged, and if there is a tendency to make a gambling game out of what might be an innocent use of a five hundred or euchre deck it is sternly inhibited.

In the saloon proper where the Kaiser's mustache once, it is possible, curled at its most arrogant angle, are more pretentious means of killing time. A phonograph with classical and popular records, a moving picture film, a piano player, one or all of these may be pro-

vided as a means of breaking up ennui, but the men show signs of this feeling only rarely. When they are not at drill themselves they find an inspiring sight in watching others drill, and the changes of the weather and all the strange sights of the ocean keep them naturally interested.

As the transport nears the war zone and the conveying destroyers draw in closer this interest deepens, but there is no nervousness or tension exhibited. The men are, if anything, a trifle gayer and livelier in their play and work as the signs of increased watchfulness are to be seen. A braver crowd of men than the 6,000 stowed on this ship could not be enlisted one captain has said who makes the double trip regularly, and each new regiment seems brighter and stancher than the preceding, if that were possible.

Many Learn to Sew on Trip.

Accomplishments which may prove useful are often acquired on the voyage over. Not many of the men come from the cantonments versed in the needlewoman's art and this is taught and practised among them. Nearly every one has a comfort kit containing thread and needles and all the boys are keen to do their own mending.

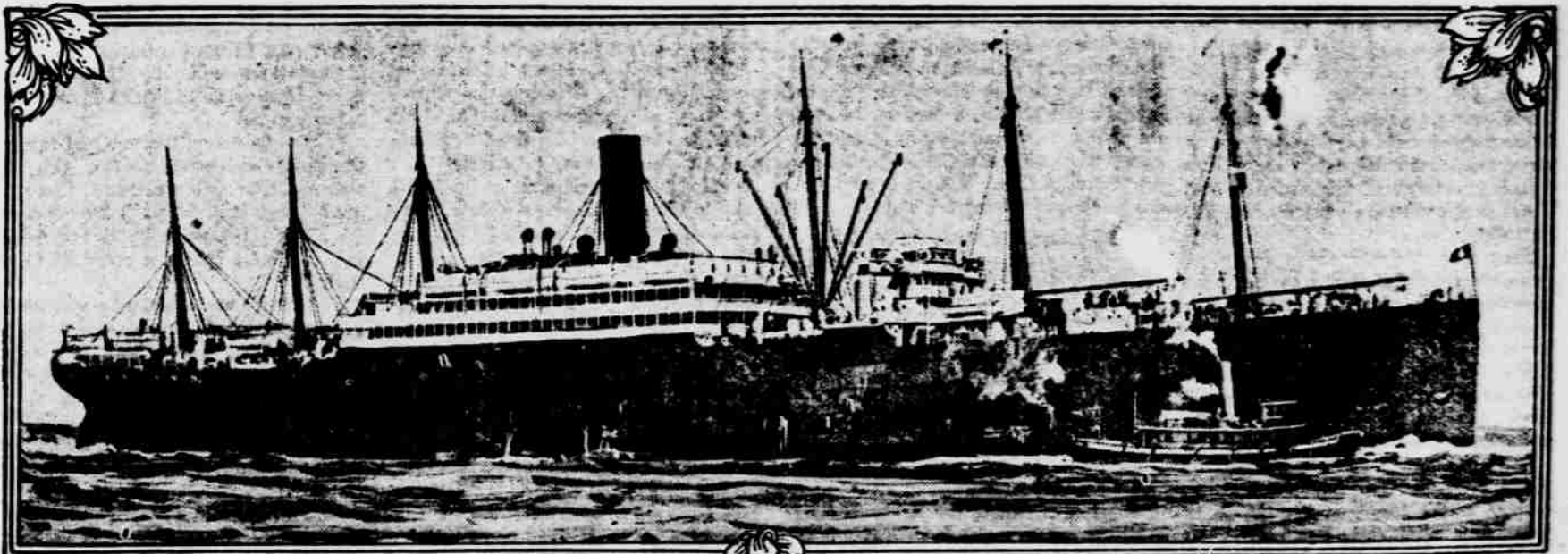
They take a boyish sort of enjoyment, too, in comparing their luxuries, the woollen socks and sweater, helmet and gauntlets which have been knitted and presented to them. Often they swap these luxuries.

Bets are laid on the log and the loser is not required to pay until the convoy lands them safely in France. There are wagers of every kind put on the least happening, whether the "Java" boy or the bread man will lead in the chow procession, anything which makes gay talk and covers up a silence. As a matter of fact passengers on a transport reveal the same kind of human nature as passengers anywhere; little things make their day and for the time their lives.

All of the transport ships and most of the conveying navy vessels have their mascots. On the President Lincoln, for instance, the mascot is a handsome tabby cat of the smoke variety, one of the most aristocratic of the breed of cats. His name is Joeffe and they tell a story of him which, if not true, at least ought to be. He has been a faithful mascot ever since being inducted into that honorable position and has never deserted the ship except on one occasion. And then Joeffe seemed to be justified by the importance of the occasion. It was no less than a cat show where blue ribbons and cash prizes were to be distributed.

Eight, perhaps nine, days is occupied in transit and routine has been established, comfort attained and custom almost made sailors of even the driest Western product. When the transport takes leave of her convoys to enter the port of destination it is easy to imagine the excitement that prevails on board.

The disembarkation is another story. Loud is the welcome accorded to each new reinforcement; the quays are crowded with enthusiastic people, bands play, handkerchiefs wave, a great shout goes up as the salwart young fellows, trim in their shoregoing garb step on this land which seems at once so friendly.



The President Lincoln, one time German merchant craft converted into a United States transport and recently sunk by three torpedoes from a Hun U-boat.